



 North Kent Methodist Circuit

grapevine

CIRCUIT NEWS AND PREACHING PLAN

*Jesus says,
'I am the true vine,
and my Father is
the vine-grower.
He removes every
branch in me that
bears no fruit.
Every branch that
bears fruit he
prunes to make
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fruit.'*

John 15:1-2



Autumn '24

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'I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-grower. He removes every branch in me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit he prunes to make it bear more fruit.' John 15:1-2

Our autumn editions of Grapevine often focus on 'harvesting,' but for this edition, we're noting that pruning and planting are also essential work for the ultimate harvest. With regard to 'pruning,' we note with sadness the closing of two churches in our circuit, Burham and Swanscombe, and the good work that has gone on in both those local patches over the past two centuries. With regards to 'planting,' we consider the work of our Local Preachers who nurture our congregations week after week.

The church closures are difficult for us to handle emotionally and pastorally: we all like to be part of the planning and harvesting, but we protest in times of pruning, especially when the pruning feels like a rebuff to our seasons of flourishing. The verses from John 15 remind us that we are 'pruned' not only when we are bearing no fruit but also when we have borne fruit. That's the sense in which the circuit and two of its churches have recently had to take tough decisions about closing and ceasing to meet for worship.

Over the past 10-20 years, the circuit has been keen to invest heavily in new housing projects near and around the areas of Swanscombe and Burham, spending very large sums of money and effort in both these areas to 'plant' new projects and churches for new people coming into the housing. For whatever reasons, those plants did not come to fruition, and the circuit reluctantly decided to discontinue the projects. Now the churches in

those areas are closing as well, but the 'planting' and 'pruning' metaphors reminds us that this not the end of the story. In both cases, exploration is continuing of how God's presence through the Methodist Church and others might be known and shared.

At a recent Superintendents' Conference, I overheard a super saying that his circuit had shown a significant increase in membership over the past year - membership that had arisen when they had closed half of the circuit's 18 churches over the previous years. Pruning had surprisingly shown growth!

Indeed, the verses quoted above come amid a long passage in which Jesus speaks about his imminent death, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and how we are to continue to love each other as God loves us. We're reminded that the Resurrection only came about through Jesus' Crucifixion - and God's love through God's Spirit continues through our endings and our beginnings.

In this issue you will find an article from the Burham Church speaking of their journey and thoughts for the future. The Swanscombe Church likewise has a long and proud history as a worshipping and fellowshiping congregation reaching out to its community. Janet and Barry Errington have been the mainstays of that congregation since they came to Swanscombe some 50 years ago and saw needs that they could address. While the surrounding neighbourhood was happy to benefit from their work, sadly, very few were willing to become active members and join in taking responsibility for that work. As this magazine is going to press, the circuit continues to seek guidance for future work in the Swanscombe community. ■

In the second part of this edition of Grapevine, we feature the work of some of our Local Preachers. Back in May, we celebrated the accreditation of two new Local Preachers, John Hudson-Beddows and Oscar Siu, with Oscar being the first Chinese LP to complete the new English version of the connexional Leaders of Worship and Preachers Course. We're proud of both these new 'gardeners' in our patch and happy to include printed copies of the testimonies they gave at their Accreditation.

We also urgently need even more Local Preachers. 'The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.' Towards that end, we have included short pieces from a few of our preachers, telling us what they enjoy about being 'gardeners' in our pulpits. Perhaps you'd like to join in! The Revd Naomi Oates heads up the Local Preachers and Worship Leaders meeting in the circuit and will be happy to talk to you about training opportunities to become a Local Preacher or a Worship Leader.

In effective pruning and planting, we look forward to an even greater Harvest ahead.

Bonni-Belle





and spiritual place of worship. Much thought has been given to how this can become something of a legacy and individuals have been considering where else they may worship. The local Community Centre is keen to host our monthly country lunch and we hope this might attract some newcomers. The local Community Pub has offered us a meeting space and we have set a date for our first informal 'Prayer and Praise' in the redundant Anglican Church to preserve some of what makes worship in Burham special.

The Church in Burham

It was with great sadness that the worshippers at The Church in Burham took the decision to close the church as it was no longer financially viable. This was subsequently ratified by Larkfield Church Council, the North Kent Circuit and the District, with the decision that the building would be sold.

There had been a Methodist Church in Burham since 1847. Jane Knott moved to the village when she married and initially organised a group of Christians to meet in her home. Land was generously donated by her husband and money was raised to build a church on the site where it had stood since 1847. Members of the Knott family still live in Burham. Later a school room was added where it was hoped a school would open, although this never happened.

In the 1980s the Anglican Church of St Mary's became structurally unsafe and had to be demolished. This event started a close relationship between the congregations of both churches, with the Anglicans using our building for services. The Diocese gave money at the time for the building to be modernised, with the removal

of the pulpit, pews and organ, and the addition of a kitchen and indoor toilets. This relationship with the Anglicans resulted in the formation of an Ecumenical Partnership which lasted for several years and although this had ended, the links continued to the present day.

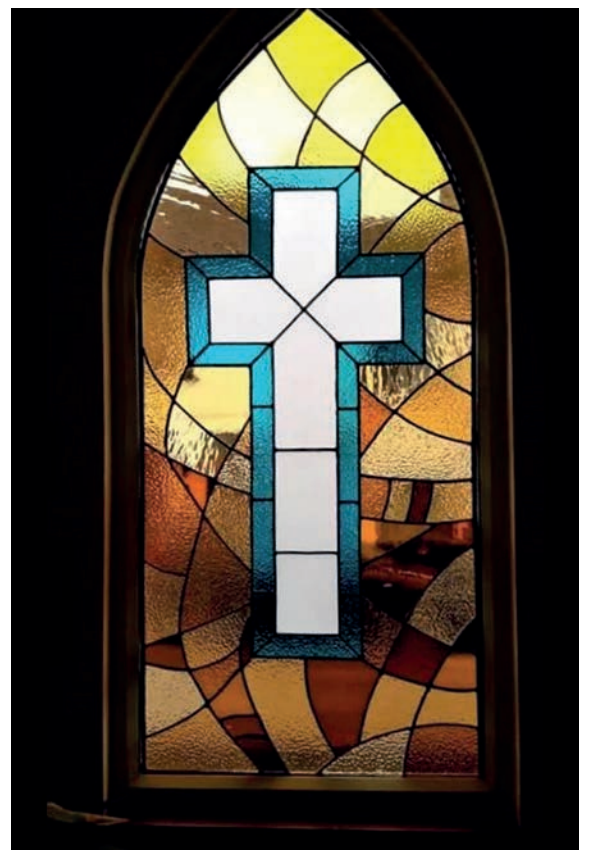
When Ecumenical Partnership ended, the Church in Burham became a Class, later a Class of Larkfield Methodist Church. Weekly services continued to be held and other activities developed. There was a monthly country lunch, book exchange, and weekly film with afternoon tea. Making the building a welcoming place in the community was at the heart of these events.

Since the sad decision was taken, we have been amazed at the comments from the local community and more widely from the Circuit, remembering this as an especially welcoming

Larkfield's Church Council has given permission for these plans, to give a continuing missional presence in the village of Burham. We hope that these seeds of ideas will enable us to grow and flourish in the community.

We ask for your prayers at this difficult time of change for Burham. Members will continue to be members of Larkfield Church with the Revd Naomi Oates having pastoral responsibility. We are most grateful for the support she has given us in recent months.

By Eileen Smith with Naomi Oates



A Calling to Preach Cross-Culturally in the British Methodist Church

Born in Southern China to parents with two linguistic backgrounds – Mandarin and Cantonese – and immersed in English clubs for years, my multicultural upbringing seemed to have laid the foundation for a pastoral future to bridge divides and cultivate unity. My academic pursuits took me through mainland China, Hong Kong, USA, Scotland and eventually to England, where the tapestry of my pastoral journey began to take shape.

It was within the embrace of an English-speaking fellowship that I found solace in Christ, culminating in my baptism within the English congregation of the Hong Kong International Methodist Church. The divine thread weaving through my life led me to delve deeper into theology, studying in both Hong Kong and the UK, eventually becoming a research associate at the Cambridge Centre for Christianity Worldwide.

I undertook the mantle of preaching in Cantonese, Mandarin and English at a Chinese Church in Cambridge, catering to the spiritual needs of migrants and their children within the community. Feeling called to preach cross-culturally in Cambridge, my heart resonated with a mission beyond the confines of a single cultural enclave. Stepping out of my comfort zone, I made an application to become a Local Preacher within the British Methodist Church, a call which was warmly received. My ministry expanded across various English-speaking congregations in Cambridge, ranging from bustling urban hubs teeming with international students to serene rural settings graced by a handful of faithful elderly attendees. A pivotal moment came as I delivered a sermon at the revered chapel of Wesley House, Cambridge, where my



words were “examined” by doctoral scholars and theologians.

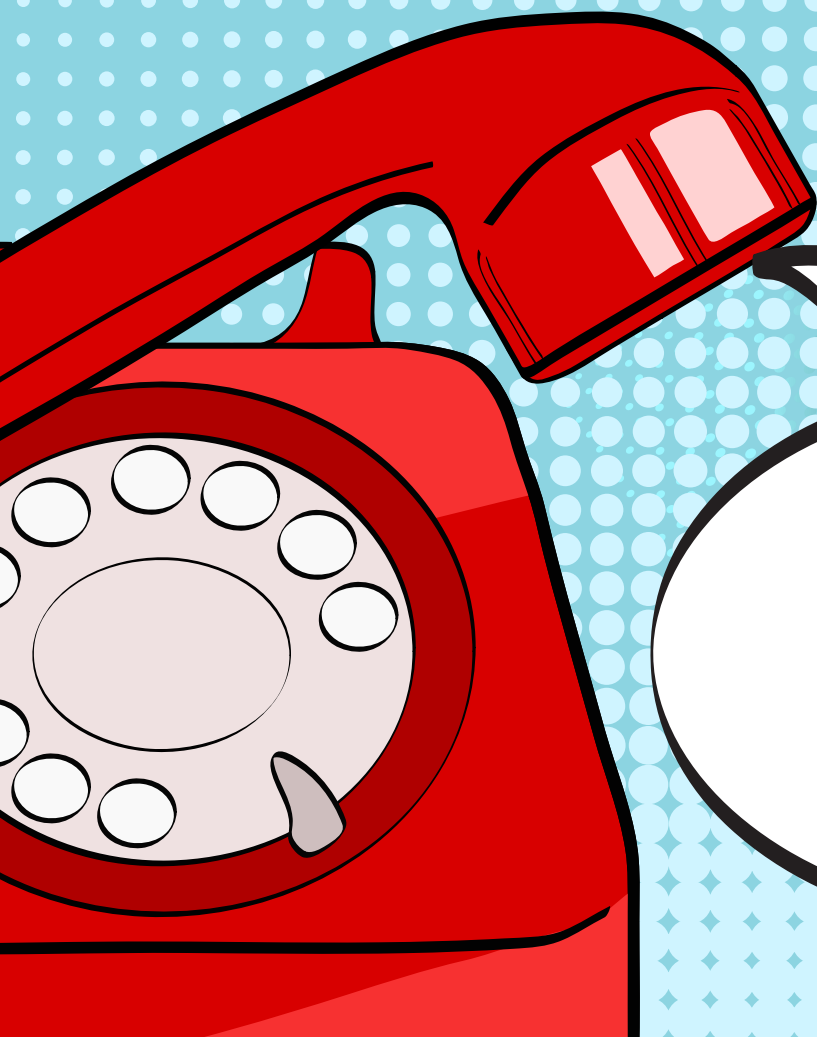
Embarking on my journey within the North Kent Methodist Circuit, I embraced my role as a local lay pastor for the Chinese Church, bridging the gap between my heritage and my newfound calling. My main responsibility involves ministering to a Chinese-speaking congregation, which includes Cantonese speakers from Hong Kong, Mandarin speakers from mainland China, Taiwan, and Malaysia, as well as their English-speaking descendants or partners. Additionally, navigating the intricacies of various local English-speaking congregations in North Kent presented me with new challenges. Tailoring my sermons to resonate with a broader audience beyond the “academic flavour” prevalent in Cambridge tested my dedication to inclusivity and outreach.

Many English-speaking congregants warmly embraced my desire for sharing Asian stories that delve into diverse cultural heritages and social challenges. Embracing diversity, I facilitated opportunities for Chinese congregants to share their life testimonies in English-speaking congregations, particularly the Third Avenue Church & Community, to foster a spirit of communal understanding and solidarity. Seeking to broaden the horizons of the Chinese Methodist Church, my initiative to invite English-speaking preachers from the circuit underscores a vision of mutual enrichment and cultural exchange. Beyond the appeal of Chinese cuisine, there is a profound invitation to embrace the depth of another cultural heritage that goes beyond language barriers.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Inspired by Acts 1:8, my journey aims to emulate the early disciples’ mission of sharing the message across various ethnicities and cultures. With humility and a commitment to life-long learning, I hope to serve with openness and gratitude amidst diverse challenges, and recognise the Lord’s guidance in every aspect of this path. As I navigate my pastoral ministry, may my cross-cultural service embody God’s love, grace, and inclusivity, blending Christian faith with diverse cultures and communities to bring glory to him.

Oscar Siu



**Please hold
Your call is
important
to us...**

God on Hold

**Written after our LPWL meeting at
St Benedict's, West Malling 25.05.2024
by Kathy Skipp**

Paul Kathy, where are you?
silence

Paul Kathy, where are you?
silence

Paul Kathy, what on earth are
you doing?

Kathy Well, I was sitting quietly!!

Paul What for?

Kathy I was sitting and waiting
for God

Paul Are you expecting him?

Kathy Yes, he said he would be
with me soon. I had to wait
my turn

Paul So how long have you been
waiting, what number are you
in the queue

Kathy Last time I heard I was about
three thousand and 29, but
I don't think much of the on-
hold music

Paul Busy person, God

Kathy Obviously

Paul Did you have anything
important to discuss
with him?

Kathy Not really, I just wanted to
check in

Paul I expect he is dealing with
all sorts of global questions
first before he gets round to
a few domestic ones based
in the UK

Kathy Yes I suspect you are right.
Three thousand and one

Paul I wonder how he prioritises
his in-box

Kathy Yes, do you think he gets
a lot of spam prayers

Paul Hello God, do you realise your
boiler needs replacing

Kathy Or your mainframe computer
has a virus, please download
our software, we will only
charge you the universe each
month to remove it.

Paul Weird isn't it?

Kathy What?

Paul To think that everyone has
a different priority for God

Kathy Well not really, we are all
individuals and we all have
different wants and needs

Paul Well I am going to cut the
grass

Kathy Okay, I will carry on waiting

God Thank you for waiting, your
call is important to me, I will
answer you when I am able,
but not necessarily as you
have requested. Please be
patient.

My Testimony



It was in 1985 that I first started finding out about church and God.

I am part of a very big family: there are nine children and a plethora of uncles, aunts, nieces and nephews, and not another single member of my family attends church.

Back in '85 I attended my sister's baptism in St Aidan's Church, Small Heath, Birmingham and that afternoon I asked my mum if I could start going to church.

Her response was "you can, but your dad will laugh at you." And so I did.

I very quickly became a boat boy, carrying the incense for the thurifer. I then became an acolyte, then a cross bearer and finally Master of Ceremonies, looking after the altar servers in three churches, St Oswald's, St Gregory's and St Aidan's.

I served the three churches until I was 21 and then I moved to London.

I didn't settle back into a church; I would try various Church of England and Catholic churches and spend a few months at each, never truly settling into a church family. Finally I found my attendance at church becoming less and less frequent, but oddly that call to service became more and more urgent.

I used my job as my ministry, praying with the residents in the care homes where I worked. I would make it my role to ensure they had spiritual provision, creating multi-faith rooms in my homes, so the residents had a focal point, a quiet place to be with God.

I was later directed to the liberal catholic church, which I joined, and I studied and was ordained a priest. This was an amazing day, but the church was so widespread and worked as a mission church, so that the family and connection was also not quite right.

I happened one day to have a meeting with Claire Potter who was the Vocations director at the Methodist church. I truly had never considered Methodism before. I was put in touch with the Revd Tony Graff, who many of you will know, and he suggested that I should attend Spital Street Methodist Church.

I have said this many times before, and it is a statement that cannot ever be overstated: as soon as I walked into Spital Street I knew it felt like home - the building, the people and surprisingly the worship.

My relationship with God has grown more than I ever would have imagined, and while I still maintain

some of my stiffness during worship, my worship is so much more meaningful, heartfelt and spirit led now.

I started my Local Preaching with help and guidance from Gill Grey and Monica Wilding.

I visited John Wesley's home and chapel on City Road, and I went to Jerusalem to strengthen my commitment to serving God.

I have bought several John Wesley Books, and I now own two Methodist theology books, which are a bit of a read, I can tell you.

I feel Methodism is now for me for life. I have come on leaps and bounds and really feel as if I have a meaningful ministry.

I will always explore the avenues to where God is calling me. I know I have a calling but to date I don't know what that is. More exploration is needed there, I think.

But for me for now what I do know is this: I owe an awful lot to my family at home and to my Spital Street family for their encouragement and love. To the wider circuit for accepting me and welcoming me, I hope my services bring you happiness and joy.

My walk with God continues onwards and I will continue to worship God and serve him, and all of you here, within the Methodist Church for as long as I am useful.

And my dad never laughed at me!

Testimony given at his Accreditation service by John Hudson-Beddows



This brings me joy!

As a local preacher, I find that the period of preparation for worship and delivering a service and sermon brings me joy. That joy only comes after reflection on the Word, with conflicting thoughts on the realities of life and living, prayers, and further consideration of how I may connect with the people. I tend always to choose a theme related to the readings to help me focus.

A week before I even start to select hymns and prepare my sermon, I consciously observe all my surroundings and take note of all or most of my encounters; particularly those encounters where I meet God in people and things. My reflection informs my hymn selections and the message I will share. As I do this, I go deeper into my own faith and Christian practice through self-reflection. This can be challenging, but it is a form of discipline to submit to God's mercy and to be confident that through his divine Grace, I will be guided by the Holy Spirit.

At the service, it is always a joyful experience to be connecting with God's people. I know that here are people who, like me, are experiencing the high cost of living, are aware of the injustices in the world and whose personal circumstances cause them to ask questions about their faith, perhaps not doubting but constantly or regularly waiting on God. We are acknowledging that our God is Good all the time.

To preach is such a privilege and a joyful experience for me. I thank God, who has enabled me to serve him through the power and wisdom of his son Jesus Christ.

Simon Africanus Rowe

As a Local Preacher...

I enjoy sharing worship with different congregations, hearing their joys and sorrows and sometimes catching their dreams. The sense of wider connection which we are able to build as we go around the churches of the circuit is important to all of us - a steady reminder of the breadth and variety of God's Kingdom.

John Stunell

What I enjoy about being a Local Preacher

Wow! Quite a lot to unpack with that heading and I'm not sure initially that 'enjoy' is the first verb I'd choose to describe being a local preacher. Firstly, it is a demanding role, especially when the lectionary throws up readings that might be difficult for me to put into a message. Current articles in news might make preparing for a service a challenge. But it would be wrong when certain world events happen, not to include them somehow and somewhere in a service (thinking on the death of the late Queen, for example).

Yet nothing comes together without lots of prayer and reflection and I always think it's really great if I can include something to do with the local church or area when I am preaching. God has called me and my fellow local preachers to this wonderful ministry and I'm not sure that any of us would have said the journey to accreditation was an easy one, but I doubt you will find one who

will say it was not worth the anxiety and in my case the moments when I'm not sure I can do this - times when I've been fairly convinced that God has just managed to make his first mistake in calling me to be a local preacher!

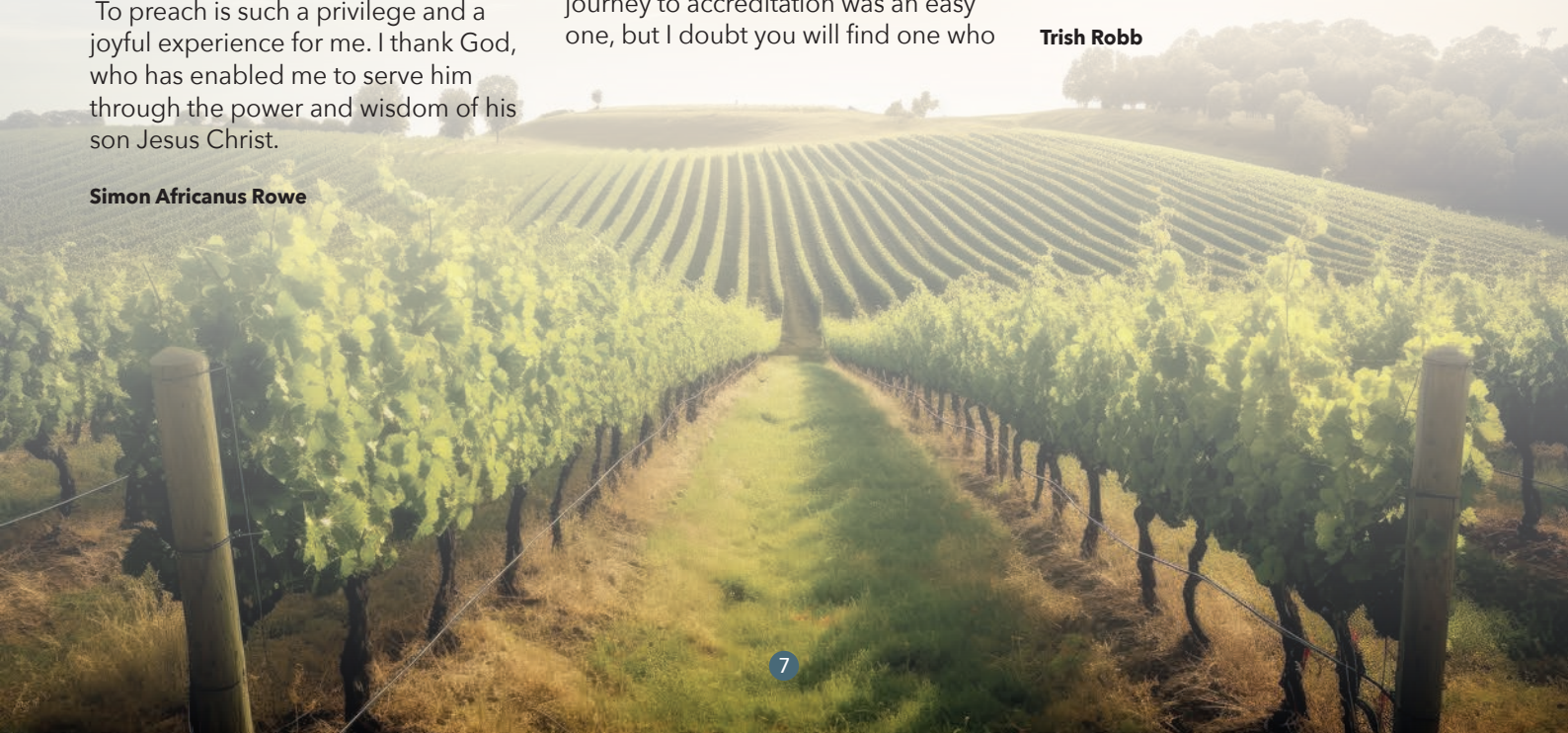
That said, God is faithful and when you invite him into your prep and study, things do tend to come together. There have definitely been moments when preparing services that it has easily been 99% God and 1% Trish.

I never feel that anything I do for congregations is quite good enough; I am fairly self-critical and always believe I could have done something differently, not necessarily better, just different. I believe this might be a touch of imposter syndrome there, but I'm sure some of you better versed in psychology would know better than me.

I really enjoy going to churches around the circuit. I like meeting new people at those churches and catching up with those I quite often only get to see at circuit meetings. I love this role that God had called me to and if I am honest, if it wasn't a challenge and I didn't get butterflies before I prepare to step up to the lectern, then I think I would panic and would have to reflect on whether my journey had or was coming to an end...

But I pray that God hasn't quite finished with me yet and I look forward to seeing you all, depending on the plan.

Trish Robb



North Kent Circuit

Preaching Plan September – November 2024

		SEPTEMBER					OCTOBER				NOVEMBER				
		1	8	15	22	29	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	
BEARSTED	10.30	LA	SHEPHERD	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	PICKARD	ZACHAR <i>us</i>	READ	PRITCHARD <i>hf</i>	ZACHAR	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	READ	LA	LA	
CHINESE	13.30	BBP/SIU <i>hc</i>	SIU	SIU	FOO <i>ca</i>	LA	SIU	E LAU <i>hc</i>	SIU	CHI WAI WU	SIU	HII <i>hc</i>	LA	SIU	
DENE HOLM	11.00	ROWE	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	DOWNS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	LA	S SMITH	IMBO	DOWNS	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	
ECCLES	10.30	LA	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	WILDING	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	PICKARD	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	WILDING	LA	
THIRD AVENUE	10.30	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	SELMES	WATTON	SELMES <i>hf</i>	ROBB	SELMES	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WATTON	SELMES	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	ROBB	
GRAVESEND	11.00	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	S SMITH	BURCH	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	ROWE	LA	DOWNS	TERRETT	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	BURCH	
HARTLIP	18.30	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GERMAN	LA	AT ST MICHAELS	GERMAN	GALLAGHER <i>rt</i>	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	GALLAGHER	SELMES <i>hc</i>	GERMAN	GALLAGHER	
HEXTABLE	10.30	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	PATERSON	IMBO	PICKARD	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	G GRAY	PATERSON	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	PICKARD	
HOPE STREET	10.30	LEMASONRY	PICKARD	LEMASONRY <i>hf</i>	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LEMASONRY	COYNE	LEMASONRY	LEMASONRY <i>hc</i>	LEMASONRY	COYNE	LEMASONRY	LEMASONRY	LEMASONRY	
KINGSWOOD	11.00	LA	MYLES	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN <i>hc</i>	ANGLICAN	LA	WEST	BAPTIST	ANGLICAN	LA	LA	LA	ANGLICAN	
LARKFIELD	10.00	OATES <i>hf</i>	WILDING	NEWELL	LA	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	R GREY	TROTT	OATES <i>hc</i>	LA	SIU	PICKARD	OATES	
	Café 15.00		WILDING					WILDING		OATES <i>rs</i>		WILDING			
NEWINGTON	9.30	LA	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ADOFO	AT BEARSTED	M SMITH	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	LA	ZACHAR @ST MARYS	M SMITH	LA	ZACHAR	M SMITH	
ST. LUKE'S	10.30	STUNELL	SELMES <i>hc</i>	LA	SIU	TROTT	SELMES <i>hc/hf</i>	PICKARD	LA	STUNELL	LA	SELMES <i>hc</i>	WATTON	TROTT	
HOLY TRINITY	10.00	ST. ALBANS	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS	ST. ALBANS <i>hc</i>	ST. DAVIDS	ST. WILLIAMS <i>hf</i>	ST. ALBANS	ST. DAVIDS <i>hc</i>	ST. WILLIAMS PICKARD	ST ALBANS <i>hc</i>	ST. DAVIDS	ST WILLIAMS <i>hc</i>	ST. ALBANS	
SITTINGBOURNE	10.30	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	ADOFO	LA	CAN-TAMAKLOE	AT BEARSTED	ZACHAR <i>ca/hf/hc</i>	ADOFO	M SMITH	LA	CAN-TAMAKLOE	ZACHAR <i>hc</i>	ADOFO	LA	
SPITAL STREET	10.30	WEST	LA	G GRAY	LA	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	DOWNS	LA	BURCH	LA	PICKARD <i>hc</i>	LA	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	
STOKE	18.30	-	ROBB	-	-	-	-	ROBB	-	-	ROBB	-	-	-	
PENINSULA STROOD	10.30	TROTT	LA	ROBB	SELMES <i>hc</i>	STUNELL	WATTON	LA	NEWELL	SELMES <i>hc</i>	ROBB	LA	STUNELL	SELMES <i>hc</i>	
TONBRIDGE RD	10.30	NEWELL	LA	PICKARD	OATES <i>hc</i>	SHEPHERD	LA	WILDING	OATES <i>hc</i>	WEST	OATES/PICKARD <i>4pm rs</i>	SHEPHERD	OATES <i>hc</i>	R GREY	
THE BRENT	10.30	DOWNS	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	HUDSON-BEDDOWS	LA	G GRAY	BURCH	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	TERRETT	ROWE	TERRETT <i>hc</i>	LA	G GRAY	
UNION STREET	10.30	(ONLINE)	(ONLINE)	AT TON. ROAD	AT BEARSTED	AT WEEK ST.	(ONLINE)	AT ST. LUKES	AT ECCLES	AT HOLY TRIN.	AT TON. RD <i>4pm rs</i>	AT WEEK ST.	AT LARKFIELD	AT TON. ROAD	
ONLINE SERVICES	10.30	PICKARD	HEXTABLE	TBA	THIRD AVE	OATES	PICKARD	HEXTABLE	TBA	THIRD AVE	PICKARD	HEXTABLE	BURCH	THIRD AVE	

PLEASE NOTE: BURHAM CHURCH'S LAST SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING WILL BE ON 1ST SEPTEMBER WITH NAOMI OATES AT 4PM

aa All-age / *bs* Breakfast Church / *ca* Church Anniversary / *cc* Café Church / *hf* Harvest Festival / *hc* Holy Communion
rs Remembering Service / *rt* Retreat Sunday / *us* United Service

For the Autumn issue: Please send contributions as a Word document, no longer than 500 words, to bonni-belle.pickard@methodist.org.uk to arrive by 20 September 2024. If you can, please attach a suitable high quality image, but do not embed it in a document.

